

4th Sunday of Lent: March 14, 2010



Theme: Wash your Hands before the Big Banquet.

Reading I: Joshua 5: 9a-10-12 Author: Followers of Joshua Date: ~ 1400 BCE

Background: After the Pentateuch (1st Five books of the Bible), Joshua is considered the 1st “Historical Book”. They tell the story of the Covenant people from the entry into the Promised Land to the return from Exile to the Maccabean revolt. Joshua was Moses’ assistant who succeeded him as the spiritual and military leader of Israel. When the time came to go to the Promised Land, God held back the water of the Jordan River so the entire nation could cross over to dry ground. Finally the people did not have to eat manna anymore, but could eat from the land. Joshua’s first victory was in Canaan in the Battle of Jericho.

Theme: The Lord provides.

Question: o What is the link between the 1st reading and Gospel?

Reading II: 2 Corinthians 10:1-6, 10-12, Author: Paul Date: ~ 55-57 AD

Background: This letter was written on his 3rd missionary journey to the church in Greece to affirm himself as an apostolic authority over false teachers in Corinth.

Theme: Whoever is in Christ is a new creation

Question: o Do we need to reconcile ourselves to Christ everyday?

Gospel: Luke: 13: 1-9 Author – Luke, the Physician Date: ~ 80-85 AD

Background: When Jesus eats with outcasts, it is not just humanitarian broadmindedness, as though the laws of God or the Pharisaic regulations did not matter; it is *God* breaking through the condemnation of his own law in order to reach out and save the lost. His forgiveness brings us to Him.

Theme: Forgiveness - Everything I have is yours.

Questions: O What was the significance of calling the younger “son”?

O When are we like the Younger son? The Elder Son? The Father?

O Do we believe that to be welcome to the joyful banquet, we have to admit we are sinners? Do we all have to wash our hands before the banquet?

O Do we forgive others like the Father forgives us?

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Reading I: [Jos 5:9a, 10-12](#)

The LORD said to Joshua,
“Today I have removed the reproach of Egypt from you.”

While the Israelites were encamped at Gilgal on the plains of Jericho,
they celebrated the Passover
on the evening of the fourteenth of the month.
On the day after the Passover,
they ate of the produce of the land
in the form of unleavened cakes and parched grain.
On that same day after the Passover,
on which they ate of the produce of the land, the manna ceased.
No longer was there manna for the Israelites,
who that year ate of the yield of the land of Canaan.

Reading II: [2 Cor 5:17-21](#)

Brothers and sisters:
Whoever is in Christ is a new creation:
the old things have passed away;
behold, new things have come.
And all this is from God,
who has reconciled us to himself through Christ
and given us the ministry of reconciliation,
namely, God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ,
not counting their trespasses against them
and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.
So we are ambassadors for Christ,
as if God were appealing through us.
We implore you on behalf of Christ,
be reconciled to God.
For our sake he made him to be sin who did not know sin,
so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

Gospel: [Lk 15:1-3, 11-32](#)

Tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to listen to Jesus,
but the Pharisees and scribes began to complain, saying,
“This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”
So to them Jesus addressed this parable:
“A man had two sons, and the younger son said to his father,
‘Father give me the share of your estate that should come to me.’
So the father divided the property between them.
After a few days, the younger son collected all his belongings
and set off to a distant country
where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation.
When he had freely spent everything,
a severe famine struck that country,
and he found himself in dire need.
So he hired himself out to one of the local citizens
who sent him to his farm to tend the swine.
And he longed to eat his fill of the pods on which the swine fed,

but nobody gave him any.
Coming to his senses he thought,
'How many of my father's hired workers
have more than enough food to eat,
but here am I, dying from hunger.
I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him,
"Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.
I no longer deserve to be called your son;
treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers."'”
So he got up and went back to his father.
While he was still a long way off,
his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion.
He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him.
His son said to him,
'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you;
I no longer deserve to be called your son.'
But his father ordered his servants,
'Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him;
put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.
Take the fattened calf and slaughter it.
Then let us celebrate with a feast,
because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again;
he was lost, and has been found.'
Then the celebration began.
Now the older son had been out in the field
and, on his way back, as he neared the house,
he heard the sound of music and dancing.
He called one of the servants and asked what this might mean.
The servant said to him,
'Your brother has returned
and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf
because he has him back safe and sound.'
He became angry,
and when he refused to enter the house,
his father came out and pleaded with him.
He said to his father in reply,
'Look, all these years I served you
and not once did I disobey your orders;
yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends.
But when your son returns
who swallowed up your property with prostitutes,
for him you slaughter the fattened calf.'
He said to him,
'My son, you are here with me always;
everything I have is yours.
But now we must celebrate and rejoice,
because your brother was dead and has come to life again;
he was lost and has been found.'

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Fr. John Kavanaugh

SJ, of St. Louis University

“Everything I have is yours.”

I believe it was the first directed retreat I made. Until then, our eight-day yearly Jesuit retreats consisted of four or five conferences a day, delivered by a preacher and mulled over by us retreatants.

Now I had a director who would assign me readings from the scripture and expect me to report how my five hours of prayer developed as the days went on.

I had found a dissatisfying pattern to my preached retreats. Somehow, after the third or fourth day (usually crowned by a yearly general confession), I seemed not to know what to do. My work, I felt, was over. My life was tidied up. All I could do was wait for the retreat to end.

Although my director for the private retreat did not like the idea of a general confession, he eventually relented on the sixth day. My work, once more, was done. Or so I thought.

What this guy did was give me five more meditations on sin—after the sixth day! And what a day it was.

I remember clearly resenting the fact that I was still thinking about sin when things should be winding down. Here I was being forced to muck around some more in my own depravity, and I was beginning to seethe. My philosophical study of atheists like Jean-Paul Sartre began to haunt me. I read in his play *The Devil and the Good Lord* that the existence of God degrades the existence of humanity, and I was suspecting Sartre could be right.

As day turned to evening, I found myself resisting the whole notion of sin. What’s the point of such negativity? Sin. Sin. Sin. God seems to exact from us a degrading admission that we are dirt, junk. The more I thought about sin, the more it nauseated me. The more I reflected on God’s mercy, the more I was turned off by it.

At this point I started to worry about my resistance. To be honest, I began to wonder whether I really believed in God in the first place. Well, rather than face that abyss, I concentrated on an old prayer which hitherto had always calmed me down. “O God, you know me and you love me.” That would do the trick.

But it didn’t. I got more resentful at God. And more worried that I might not even have faith in God.

After an hour of fret called meditation, a little variation on my prayer came to mind. Say: “O God, you know me and you love me; and it’s not because of anything I have ever done or accomplished.”

Now, dear reader, I do not know where that idea came from. But I hated it. Every time I approached uttering the final clause, I gagged. “It’s not because of anything I have ever done or accomplished. . . .” I just could not say it. It seemed as if everything would fall apart if I did.

My efforts don’t count? Then why not have an affair, abandon my vows? Why not kill somebody? Didn’t sacrifices count? Didn’t my hard work matter? Then why have I been trying so hard? If what I’ve done or accomplished doesn’t earn God’s love and salvation, then try so hard to do the right thing? “I’ve slaved for you.” The story of the prodigal son invaded my memory. That second son. The son who slaved. The son who resented the father’s forgiveness for an ingrate brother who botched everything. The son who would not join the party. The son whose father pleaded. The son who complained.

“For years now I have slaved for you. I never disobeyed one of your orders, yet you never gave me so much as a kid goat to celebrate with my friends. Then when this son of yours returns after having gone through your property with loose women, you kill the fatted calf for him.”

Somehow I knew my sin as I had never known before. Yet, oddly, I felt God’s love with startling newness and equal intensity. “My son, you are with me always, everything I have is yours. But we have to celebrate and rejoice. When hearing the story of the Prodigal Son, we often think of the compassionate father waiting at the gate or the desperate son planning his confession in advance. But might there not be a second child in all of us? We work hard, we manicure virtues, we collect the graces, we notch up victories. And we forget what is already ours. The gift, the grace, the kingdom, the love not earned but lavishly given. Before long, our labors become slavery; our accomplishments, chains.

I thought if I would ever say a prayer like, “You know me and you love me, and it’s not because of anything I have ever done or accomplished,” I would surely stop working. As it turned out, the next year I worked harder than I ever had before. But that year, it was less from fear and more from joy. Luke reminds us that the parable of the prodigal was told to Pharisees who complained about Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners. Now, in relief, I thank God for such a banquet.

Forgiven

The parable of the two lost sons is Jesus' self justification for "hosting" sinners at table fellowship.

The younger son (vv. 11-24). Fathers were discouraged from distributing inheritance during their lifetime ([Sirach 33:20-24](#)). But if he did, a father still was entitled to live off the proceeds while he lived.

This son acts shamefully, effectively wishing his father were dead. That the father did not explode and discipline him on the spot testifies to the depth of his love.

The elder son is no better. Instead of protesting the inappropriate property division and refusing his share, he accepts it (v. 12). And he makes no effort to reconcile his father and brother as culture demanded that he should. His behavior is equally shameful.

The younger son sinks deeper into shame. Selling his share of the family wealth infuriates his village neighbors (see [1 Kings 21:3](#)). Losing his money to non-Judeans through wasteful spending in a far-off land makes things worse. When the famine comes, he begins to starve.

In desperation, he tries to leech on to a wealthy patron, who in turn hopes to repel him by assigning a repulsive job. To the amazement of all, this Judaic lad agrees to feed pigs.

Still he starves. The carob pods fed to the pigs were the wild variety with bitter berries, nauseating and insufficiently nourishing to humans. Even though entitled to a share of butchered animals, the Judaic boy could not eat this forbidden food.

Motivated by his severe hunger, he regrets having lost the money (vv. 17-19). Not only can he no longer support himself, but he is also unable now to care for his father in old age. This he deeply regrets.

His solution? He resolves to become a "hired servant" of his family, thereby regaining a measure of honor, independence, and a social status equal to his brother and father. Moreover, he will be able to pay back what he lost, that is, he will be able to take care of his father for as long as the father lives.

He is willing to accept the shameful fact that the village will disown, reject, and physically abuse him for taking inheritance from the father before his death and then losing it to Gentiles, that is, non-Judeans (See [Sirach 26:5](#)). He judges this a small price to pay for life and food.

The father then acts totally out of cultural character. He runs (very inappropriate for an elder) the gauntlet the village has prepared for the returning wayward son. He publicly forgives the son by kissing him again and again on the cheeks, and heals the broken relationship between them.

The best robe is certainly the father's. It will guarantee the son's acceptance by the community at the banquet. The signet ring indicates enormous trust. The sandals are a sign of being a free man in the house, not a servant. By placing sandals on his feet, the servants signal their reacceptance of him as son.

Killing the calf means the entire village will be invited and prodded toward forgiveness. This size animal can feed more than one hundred people.

The elder son (vv. 25-32). Instead of honoring his father by accepting his brother and playing his appropriate role as chief host at the meal, the elder son publicly insults and humiliates his father (vv. 28-30).

Here the parable ends, rather abruptly.

What did the elder son do? That is the question the Pharisees and scribes (see Luke 15:2) and the modern believer must answer. What would you do?

All that God looks for from us is the slightest opening and he forgives a multitude of sins. Let me tell you a parable that will confirm this.

There were two brothers: they divided their father's goods between them and one stayed home, while the other went away to a foreign country, wasted all he had been given, and then could not bear the shame of his poverty.

Now the reason I have told you this parable is so that you will understand that even sins committed after baptism can be forgiven if we face up to them. I do not say this to encourage indolence but to save you from despair, which harms us worse than indolence.

The son who went away represents those who fall after baptism. This is clear from the fact that he is called a son, since no one is called a son unless he is baptized. Also, he lived in his father's house and took a share of all his father's goods.

Before baptism no one receives the Father's goods or enters upon the inheritance. We can therefore take all this as signifying the state of believers. Furthermore, the wastrel was the brother of the good man, and no one is a brother unless he has been born again through the Spirit.

What does he say after falling into the depths of evil? *I will return to my father.*

The reason the father let him go and did not prevent his departure for a foreign land was so that he might learn well by experience what good things are enjoyed by the one who stays at home.

For when words would not convince us God often leaves us to learn from the things that happen to us.

When the profligate returned after going to a foreign country and finding out by experience what a great sin it is to leave the father's house, the father did not remember past injuries but welcomed him with open arms.

Why? Because he was a father and not a judge. And there were dances and festivities and banquets and the whole house was full of joy and gladness.

Are you asking: "Is this what he gets for his wickedness?"

Not for his wickedness, but for his return home; not for sin, but for repentance; not for evil, but for being converted.

What is more, when the elder son was angry at this the father gently won him over, saying: *You were always with me, but he was lost and has been found; he was dead and has come back to life.*

"When someone who was lost has to be saved," says the father, "it is not the time for passing judgment or making minute inquiries, but only for mercy and forgiveness.

John Chrysostom (c.347-407) was born at Antioch and studied under Diodore of Tarsus, the leader of the Antiochene school of theology. After a period of great austerity as a hermit, he returned to Antioch where he was ordained deacon in 381 and priest in 386. From 386 to 397 it was his duty to preach in the principal church of the city, and his best homilies, which earned him the title "Chrysostomos" or "the golden-mouthed," were preached at this time. In 397 Chrysostom became patriarch of Constantinople, where his efforts to reform the court, clergy, and people led to his exile in 404 and finally to his death from the hardships imposed on him. Chrysostom stressed the divinity of Christ against the Arians and his full humanity against the Apollinarians, but he had no speculative bent. He was above all a pastor of souls, and was one of the most attractive personalities of the early Church.

Joshua has taken over the leadership of the people of Israel and has led them for all these years of their wandering in the desert ([First Reading](#)). They do arrive in their new land which is flowing with abundance.

Because of their years of slavery in Egypt and the forty-year pilgrimage in the desert, those men born during these years were not circumcised. Circumcision was the physical sign of agreement or acceptance of the covenant made with Abraham years before.

This not being circumcised was the “reproach of Egypt”, because the men of Egypt were not circumcised. At their entering of the new and holy land then, they paused and had the men more fully enter the Jewish traditions and practices. At that time then, they celebrated as full members of the Jewish people, the great Passover in remembrance of their being freed from slavery.

There is an ending of the raining down of manna and the beginning of the eating from the produce from their new abundant land. God had been faithful to the covenant by freeing them, feeding them, and now they were to earn their bread from the sweat of their brows and the fertility of the land.

The [Gospel](#) is a wonderful parable open to all kinds of questions, answers, and self-reflections. The context or setting of Jesus’ relating this last of three parables about losing and finding, is central to the importance of all three parables which make up this whole chapter.

The Pharisees and scribes began to complain, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” So it is exactly and directly to them that Jesus tells this story about two sons.

One son, the younger, in a sense, the newer to the family, is a selfish, greedy, rebellious fellow. The elder son, one who came first, has done all things well: “Look, all these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders.”

The Pharisees certainly knew with whom Jesus was comparing them. As the father welcomed back the disobedient son, so the “sinners” are welcomed by Jesus and eats with them as do the father and his household eat with the welcomed back son.

The elder son does not want to have anything to do with the household, the younger son nor the celebration. The Pharisees, who hear in the parable whom they represent, stand at a distance and judge the entire gathering of Jesus and his company of sinners.

The father recalls to his elder son that they have always been together and in love have shared in everything. “You were never lost,” the father tells him, “but your brother was dead and gone, but now he has returned.” There is always the welcome back of God. Jesus is expressing that God never separates from even the worst sinner.

The father had gone out each day to see if the younger son had come to his senses, and the son had done just that. Sitting with the pigs and their messiness, the son looks around, smells around and wakes up. Remember, pigs, to the Jewish religious sensitivities were the worst things with which to associate. He talks himself back to his truest identity, that he is a son of a loving father.

He makes the very natural statement that he no longer should be any more regarded as who he once was, the son. He rises and prepares to talk his way back into, not sonship, but one who will work for his bread by the sweat of his brow. The rest of the story is Jesus-wise predictable.

The theme of course is that Jesus is the Redeemer and not the approver or excluder. The Pharisees are the disapprovers and excluders and Jesus is putting himself in direct opposition to them and their ways.

One interpretation of this parable is that each of us combines both sons in our one self. The elder part of us is ordered, strict, obedient, logical, exact, dutiful, and pleased with our own good works. We have the proper tickets.

The younger part of us is inconsistent, envious, wanderous, self-satisfying, independent, and stubborn. We are quite a war within.

Our elder-side would like to tie down tightly the younger-side. Our self-righteousness does not want that looser side to be seen by anybody. It wants to appear better than it knows itself to be. The elder-side judges everything it does or thinks and is quite unhappy with the internal tensions.

The younger-side does eventually come to its senses. The emptiness of trying to build himself, achieve himself, indulge himself, renders him senseless about his true self. The emptiness of whatever pigpen he lands in moves him up and out and back to his true home. We live in that tension then between the self-righteous and the self-redeemed-by-Christ. Those who live severely judging others are victimized by their own self-centered severity. Those who are forgiven, tend to be forgiving of others.

So are we in or out? We are welcomed, invited, embraced, but both sons had to respond freely. It is not easy to be welcomed in when we are a bit outside ourselves. It is truly humbling to want to be perfect and yet in order to be admitted into the welcome-home banquet, we have to admit ourselves back into our true, fragmented selves.

I have fun imagining how the tax collectors and other sinners, sitting with Jesus and actually eating with him, heard this parable and called to the Pharisees, who were also intently listening to the parable, to get real and “Come and have something good to eat with us, you don’t need tickets, and if you have to, go ahead and wash your hands.

WOW Word of the Day

<p>Hand Washing</p> <p>Everything at the banquet is yours</p>	<p>March 14</p>
<p>Fruit</p> <p>Bear fruit or wither and die</p>	<p>March 7</p>
<p>Transfiguration</p> <p>Lent is a time of change & conversion</p>	<p>Feb. 28</p>
<p>Temptation</p> <p>Get your food and strength from God and resist temptation .</p>	<p>Feb. 21</p>
<p>Attitude</p> <p>Trust in God leads to blessings. Trust in humans alone leads to woe.</p>	<p>Feb. 14</p>
<p>Rise:</p> <p>Get in, get out and raise men to faith</p>	<p>Feb. 7</p>
<p>Faith:</p> <p>God performs miracles for those who have faith and love.</p>	<p>Jan. 31</p>
<p>Word made Flesh:</p> <p>Jesus reads scripture in the temple that He is the Son of Man</p>	<p>Jan. 24</p>
	<p>Jan. 17</p>
	<p>Jan. 10</p>
	<p>Jan. 3</p>

Genealogy of Man

Adam

130 years old when Seth born. Lived ~ 930 years. Adam & Eve also had Cain & Abel

Seth

Enosh

Canain

Mahalelel

Jared

Enoch

Methuselah

Lamech

Noah

600 when floods came. Stayed in Arc 1 year. Lived ~950 years. Noah had 3 sons: Shem, Ham & Japheth

Shem

Abram

Born ~ 2166 BC. Leaves Egypt for Canaan (Israel). Married Sarai.

Abram had another son by Hagar - Sarai's maidservant- named Ishmael. Ishmael is Father of Arabs.

Isaac

Jacob

12 sons: Including Judah & Benjamin (12 tribes of Israel)

The 12 tribes of Jacob join Moses in exodus from Egypt 430 years after Jacob went to Egypt

I

Moses

Moses' Father is Levi & brother is Aaron. 1500 AD

